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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE COURTS MARTIAL FOR FEBRUARY 24 "COUP
PLOTTERS"

REF: A. MANILA 0852

[1](#)B. MANILA 0830

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: A committee investigating an alleged failed February 24 coup d'etat may soon recommend that at least three senior military officers and perhaps dozens of junior officers face military courts on charges ranging from conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman to mutiny and sedition. Malacanang welcomed the investigation and asserted that evidence against the officers vindicates President Arroyo's decision to declare a State of National Emergency in response to the alleged plot. If the AFP moves forward with these charges, it will be a novel effort to hold even senior military officers accountable for destabilization plots within their command. End Summary.

Leaked Report Hints at New Charges

[1](#)2. (U) Since April, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Inspector General Rear Admiral Rufino Lopez has led a fact-finding committee to make recommendations to AFP Chief of Staff General Generoso Senga on possible disciplinary action against AFP officers in connection with the alleged plot that led to the declaration of a State of National Emergency on June 24 (ref B). Lopez said on July 4 that his committee had not yet concluded its investigation, but the local media has quoted from what appears to be a leaked advance version. According to these reports, the recommendation will be to file charges in courts martial ranging from conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman to mutiny and sedition against then-Marines commandant Major General Renato Miranda, Brigadier General Danilo Lim of the Philippine Army (Scout Rangers), and Colonel Ariel Querubin of the Philippine Marines. The committee may also recommend charges against approximately 35 other officers from the Philippine Marines and Philippine Army.

[1](#)3. (U) A major television network also aired in its evening news on July 3 a 10-minute video clip showing BG Lim, flanked by several officers, declaring o/a February 23 that he was withdrawing his support from an "unconstitutional" and "bogus" president. Rumors of the existence of this video have been in circulation since February 24, when it apparently would have aired had Lim succeeded in securing broader support within the AFP. Earlier media reports, including a controversial Time magazine article, had already linked Lim not only to such military intrigue but also to opposition politicians and other alleged coup plotters. One former ambassador on July 5 publicly claimed the Lim-backed plot had in February had enjoyed widespread support from private citizens, including those who would have served on a

"transition council" to take over after President Arroyo's ouster.

Malacanang Welcomes Investigation

¶4. (U) Malacanang has publicly welcomed the AFP's move to investigate those involved in the February 24 coup attempt. According to Presidential chief of staff Michael Defensor, "the arrests and investigation of these officials who stray from the Constitution and the law is the proper strong response." Presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye separately said that the release of the video tape "vindicated" the President in declaring a state of national emergency.

Officers Ready to Face Charges

¶5. (U) Major General Miranda, who stepped down as Marine Commandant on February 26, told the media that he and other senior AFP officers are ready to submit themselves to investigation and court martial. He noted that being charged does not constitute guilt, but is part of the due process that would give him an opportunity to clear his name. Meanwhile, Opposition Senators Panfilo Lacson and Rodolfo Biazon, whom media reports alleged as part of the coup plotters' planned transition government, denied any involvement.

Comment

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¶6. (SBU) General Senga may be reluctant to make such a major decision during the last days of his tenure as Chief of Staff; it took him months to sign off even on the court martial conviction in December of former Comptroller General Carlos Garcia. But should the AFP proceed with these courts martial, either under Senga or his still-unnamed successor, it would mark a real departure from previous practice, whereby senior officers either did not face charges or received amnesty after coup attempts. Most recently, no one above the rank of captain faced prosecution following the failed 2003 "Oakwood Mutiny." However, one senior Marine general noted privately that the charges against the Marine officers would likely not pan out, since "we did not move troops," in sharp contrast to what he admitted were the troop movements of the Scout Rangers under the command of BG Lim on the eve of February 24.

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Kenney